

Caught Between Two Worlds: Conception of Giftedness
in the Dumagat-Remontados Culture of Paglitao

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Abstract

This research effort is a preliminary study about the concept of giftedness of the *Dumagat-Remontados* of Paglitao. The researchers used indigenous methods of research such as *pakapa-kapa*, *pagtatanong-tanong* and *pakikipagkwentuhan* to elicit tentative but authentic results from the tribe informants. Apparently, the linearity of research expectations became fluid in the process as a validation of indigenous research. The topics outlined initially, for instance, include indigenous definition of giftedness, origin of giftedness and its conception, and a *Dumagat* term for giftedness. Although the outline was maintained in this paper, the research method had gradual modifications as new insights are introduced in the research proceedings.

This study corroborated that diverse forms of giftedness exist in many cultures in the Philippines. Apart from extraordinary academic intelligence or any scholastic talents, it is highly demonstrated in the *Dumagat-Remontados* that healing, psychic, moral, and spiritual prowess are some of these gifts. Having identified such diverse gifts, however, *agimat* appeared to be the central code in the informants' ideas about the nature of giftedness. But the utility of *agimat* is both cultivated and innate – blurring the dichotomy of the Mystery and Mastery Model of Giftedness.

The study ends with the recommendation for a cultural reaffirmation even in the conceptions of giftedness. This entails a culture-fair literature on one hand and an inclusive education on the other that could further broaden the categories of the way giftedness is conceptualized.

Introduction

In the widespread acknowledgment of gifted people, it is a given fact that giftedness has not been categorically defined. Even schools easily buy into conventional constructs without deciding for themselves what are being valued in certain contexts. Nonetheless, “it is important that the program itself and the way performance in it is assessed reflect the values expressed in the means of identification” as argued by Sternberg (2004, p.15).

Constructs on academic intelligence or any educational achievement awarded in schools, for example, are often easily interchangeable with the notion of giftedness. But it could be rightly questioned if the achievement is aligned at all to what is being valued as the child goes back to his or her own community. Hence, contextualization is necessary in the identification of giftedness and it seems to validate that coming up with a categorical definition may eventually be problematic.

Wong-Fernandez & Bustos-Oroza (2007) notes that over the decades, clinical psychologists, educational psychologists and school-based counselors have been involved in the identification and assessment of giftedness in the Philippines. Some of them were actually trained in the United States; whereas there are some trained in the Philippines but still under U.S. educated professors. It can be anticipated then that the initiatives of understanding giftedness in the country have been based on Western notions and conceptualizations. This is the very critique of Filipino Psychology championed by Enriquez (1976). Surely different localities have different valuations that may not easily flat out with universal notions.

Forms such as moral and spiritual gifts are often neglected since Western-influenced education is mostly directed at the identification, development and nurturance of mental, physical, psychological, and social gifts (Camara, 1993). This creates a gap between what is recognized in the more dominant scholastic circles and what is observed in the less recognized indigenous groups. Being a diverse country however, ethnolinguistically and geographically, the Philippines may demonstrate variegated conceptions of giftedness. Consequently, Wong-Fernandez & Bustos-Oroza (2007) committed their research to Tagalog-speaking communities in rural Baliuag and urban Marikina. The gathered data evidently demonstrated the Filipinos' inclination to interactive assimilation of concepts just as articulated by Enriquez (1976). Their respondents understand giftedness according to the dominant and conventional view of intelligence while, at the same time, there are hints of spiritual and moral aspects.

This current preliminary study, focusing on the Dumagat-Remontados of Paglitao in Antipolo, Rizal, may be considered as an added resource to the dearth of studies on indigenous conceptualizations. The nuances of what this tribe considers as gifted are interesting in its paradoxes and ambiguities. They feel inferior to foreigners, particularly to lowlanders and

want to adjust to their seemingly superior Tagalog language but at the same time they consider the *usap Dumagat* as a demonstration of giftedness. Formal education seems not much valued in their culture, but they give high regard to those who studied for economic sustainability. Although the Dumagat-Remontados are able to preserve precolonial cultural patterns compared to most peoples in the region, the pressure to keep up with the lowlanders are evident in the conversations with the researcher. Finally, the utility of the *agimat* is both cultivated and innate – blurring the dichotomy of the Mystery and Mastery Model of Giftedness. In fact, seemingly polar code-pairs (e.g. *salin-salin* and *bulong*) are connected to each other by virtue of *agimat* as generated thru the QDA Miner.

Methods

Research Design

People's lives are filled with stories they construct about their experiences. As noted by Connelly & Clandinin (1990) "Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world." Therefore, in order to understand the context of ones' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, there is a need to access and appreciate the people's different social constructions of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1990). *Pakapa-kapa*, "a suppositionless approach to social scientific investigation" (Torres, 1982) aimed at searching and sifting through a mass of unsystematized social and cultural data, was used to obtain order, meaning, and direction in the current research. Moreover, an indigenous method of interview known as *pagtatanong-tanong* was used to understand the concept of giftedness among the Dumagat-Remontados of Paglita. In this method, equivalent probe questions were presented to informants to find out whether similar responses will be generated by the concept under study. Pe-Pua (2005)

identified four major characteristics of *Pagtatanong-tanong*: (a) it is participatory in nature; direction of the interaction and time management is heavily based on the informant. (b) The researcher and the informant have an egalitarian relationship. (c) It is appropriate and adaptive to the conditions of the group of informants. (d) It is integrated with other indigenous research methods. The current research sought to imbibe all the four characteristics identified above.

Research Locale

The present research was conducted at Sitio Paglita, a Dumagat-Remontados community located on the peak of Mount Calumpong known to be the farthest point in the village of Calawis in Antipolo City. The Dumagat-Remontados is a Negrito ethnolinguistic group, derived from the “Spanish verb ‘remontar,’ meaning, ‘to flee to the hills,’ ‘to frighten away,’ or ‘go back to the mountains’” (Gutierrez et al., 2012). They are said to be the descendants of lowlanders who fled to the mountains at the time of Spanish occupation. They intermarried with the Negrito groups and preferred to be called simply as “‘taga-bundok’ (from the mountains) or ‘magkakaingin’ (those who practice kaingin).” (Gutierrez et al., 2012).

Based on the record of the key informant, the community is comprised of 59 households or a population of about 250-300 individuals. While there were 2 sari-sari stores during the time of visit, fire-fallow cultivation of root crops is the foundation of their subsistence livelihood which means they acquire from the land only what they need and produce what they can to support their daily sustenance. When they need to procure daily essentials and when they run out of rice supply, they sell their produce in Barangay Calawis. As formal education is not mandatory in their culture, a large section of the population do not, write nor keep track of their age.

Because of their semi-nomadic nature (Gutierrez et al., 2012), Remontados' homes are made of light materials such as straw and wood and they possess very few material belongings except those that nature has given them. However, their community is rich in both human and social assets which need to be studied and are in grave danger of being forgotten. These include their local dialect, which is colloquially known as *usap Dumagat*, values, traditions, and practices such as their indigenous methods of catching game, as well as their traditional healing practices known as *bulong* and *buga-buga*.

Informants Selection

A tribal missionary who has been in contact with the Remontados communities in Rizal served as the *key informant* for the current paper. The said *tulay* (Pe-Pua, 1989) introduced the researcher to the community, helped gain the people's confidence, and served as a good source of information about the group in general. Since 2016, he has been visiting several Dumagat communities in Rizal and nearby provinces as the said indigenous group are scattered across several mountain ranges. Recently, he has been conducting cultural profiling for the Remontados of Paglitao which he visits twice a week. Because of this, the key informant is known and respected in the group such that some individuals expressed initiative to accompany the researcher and the key informant in visiting the homes of potential informants. Moreover, they are greeted with warmth and are even invited to commune with the members of the household through offering coffee or to dine with them for lunch.

Chain-referral sampling was used to recruit 10 research informants, 4 of which are males and 6 are females. Snowballing started with the wife of the community chieftain who later on identified other potential informants. The researcher did not take note of the informants' age as many of them do not

practice age keeping. However, the researcher specifically looked for members of the community who can either speak or understand *usap Dumagat*. Participants were either inside their homes or nearby sheds when they were recruited. They were either resting, tending to their harvested crops, or having a cigarette break. They were wearing ordinary clothes of t-shirt or tank top, and shorts or long denim pants.

Instruments

Originally, an interview guide adapted from Wong-Fernandez & Bustos-Oroza (2007) was constructed. The research questions are as follows:

1. Do you know any gifted person? How do you know he or she is gifted?
2. How do you deal with gifted persons? What do you feel if you think a person is gifted?
3. What was your first understanding of the word “gifted”?
4. When or how did you first know about being gifted?
5. At present, what is your understanding of the word or conception of giftedness?
6. Did your understanding of this word change? If it did, what made it change?
7. Where do your present definition of the word “gifted” come from and how did it come about?
8. In your opinion, where does giftedness originate?
9. Who determines that a person is gifted?
10. What word do you think mean the same as or as close to the word “gifted”?

However, following the recommendations of Pe-Pua (1989), a tentative outline of topics was instead created for the purpose of *pagtatanong-tanong*. The said topics include indigenous definition of giftedness, origin of giftedness and its conception, and a *Dumagat* term for giftedness. The

outline was revised and improved as the method opens new and richer perspectives. As conversations progressed from one informant to the next, some questions were either revised or omitted, while adding new ones based on conversations from previous informants. In this regard, the informants have major inputs not only in the data but also in the manner such information is gathered (Pe-Pua, 1989). For instance, based on previous conversations with the key informant, the term '*gebulong*' surfaced as a tentative word to refer to 'giftedness'. However, the first informant expressed that the said term is not frequently used in Paglitao as it is used mainly by *Alta Dumagat* and not by *Dumagat-Remontados*. After the said conversation, the researcher opted to use the term '*galing*' to refer to giftedness as this is a word commonly used to refer to the concept of 'talent' in Paglitao.

Data Collection

Data collected for this pilot study took place from November 20, 2019 to November 22, 2019.

After gaining permission to conduct the proposed study from the barangay hall, the researcher with the assistance of the key informant proceeded to the house of the community chieftain for proper introduction and to seek guidance in recruiting informants. The leader's house is located at the center of the community near the elementary school, the only concrete structure in the area. The researcher was greeted by the chief's wife and was informed that while the community is already expecting the visit, the chief went to *Baranggay Calawis* to procure building materials. The chief's wife agreed to serve as the first informant. The first part of the 56-minute conversation was dedicated to *pakikipag-palagayan* where the topic was the informant's experiences with serving the community as the wife of the chieftain. Moreover, the informant explained that instead of using the term *gebulong* to refer to giftedness, it is more appropriate to use *galing* or *talino*. The researcher opted to use *galing* instead of *talino* as the latter is

associated with cognitive skills in the Tagalog language. The researcher took note of potential informants who were identified by the chieftain's wife. Among these individuals are speakers of *usap Dumagat*, community elders, and local healers. Accompanied by the key informant, the researcher visited each potential informant in their dwelling. While 3 of the original 12 identified individuals were either in field or in *Calawis* during the time of visit, the researcher was able to recruit other informants. In fact, some informants would even invite their family members to join in the discussion. This led to a more multilateral and free-flowing *pakikipagkwentuhan* (Pe-Pua, 2005) where ideas and stories were freely exchanged between the researcher, the key informant, and the informants. This happened thrice during the course of data gathering. First, with one of the community elders who invited his wife who is also a local healer. Second, with another elder who invited her daughter to join. And lastly, with a group of elders who were tending their harvested crops in a shed near their dwellings. The researcher noted that the data gathered from this kind of conversation are rich with indigenous stories and ideas compared to one-on-one *pagtatanong-tanong*.

Conversations were tape-recorded with the consent of the informants. This method of data-recording was selected over overtly taking down notes as it is a less reactive strategy which has the ability of storing information accurately, including those that one is not attentive to during the *pagtatanong-tanong* (Pe-Pua, 1989). Informants were briefed before and debriefed after each session of *pagtatanong-tanong*. Tape-recorded data were transcribed and coded by an independent coder. QDA Miner was used by the researchers and the coder for identifying the theme and for mapping co-occurring concepts in the transcripts.

Results and Discussion

Emic Definition and Descriptions of Giftedness

This section of the paper presents how giftedness, *galing* in the native dialect, is defined and described within the social group. When asked to describe persons whom they considered gifted or *may galing*, informants mentioned supernatural talents and abilities. Table 1 presents a sample of the most common responses in Tagalog with their English translation.

Table 1

Informants' Description of Whom They Consider as Gifted

Responses in Tagalog	English Translation
May kakaibang alam	Having unusual knowledge
Hindi tinatablan ng bala o taga	Immune to bullet or blade
May bulong	Whisper
Nakakapang-gamot	Ability to heal
Bubuga ng <i>maman</i>	Spit bettle nut after chewing
May di-pangkaraniwang galing	Having uncommon skill
Nakakarating sa malayong lugar ng mabilis at hindi pawisan	Can travel long distance quickly and without breaking sweat
Nakakapagsalita ng <i>usap Dumagat</i>	Can speak <i>Dumagat</i> language
May alam na orasyon	Knows incantation
May agimat	Possesses a charm

Based on the responses identified in Table 1, informants seem to converge towards the understanding that giftedness is demonstrated by a person through supernatural feats such as immunity to gunshot or hacking, the ability to cure diseases by whispering, spewing chewed bettle nuts, or cigarette smoke, and the ability to travel long distance quickly and with ease. These responses corroborates with what Camara (1993) reported that diverse forms of giftedness which Western literature rarely acknowledge exist in many cultures in the Philippines. Healing, psychic, moral, and spiritual prowess are some of these identified indigenous gifts.

Because of the high social and economic value Filipinos place on formal education (Wong-Fernandez & Bustos-Oroza, 2007) it is not surprising that for many, there is a strong tendency to limit conceptions of giftedness to intelligence (Camara, 1993). However, it seems this is not the case for the informants as academic performance was not identified as a key feature in the nature of giftedness. Bevan-Brown (2005) established that “culture not only influence areas in which giftedness is recognized and the ways giftedness is demonstrated, but it also influences the fundamental nature of giftedness itself.” Since educational accomplishment bears little utility in the semi-nomadic and subsistence culture of the Dumagat-Remontados, academic performance therefore is not valued as a capacity where giftedness is demonstrated. While this might be surprising for some, especially those who came from cultures where formal education is valued, Gardner (2011) expressed that the value of a particular domain of intelligence is not universal but is restricted to certain cultures. This explains why the capacity to read is important in dominant Filipino culture but is minimally valued in Paglita. Areas where giftedness is recognized are those which bear significant role in the community lives of the Dumagat-Remontados. These includes ethnopharmacological knowledge and indigenous healing practices, mystical ability to avoid physical harm, and transcendent navigational adeptness. This is similar to what has been reported by Kornhaber, Krechevsky, & Gardner (1990) that intelligence in traditional cultures is linked less on advanced abilities in the 3Rs and more on skills in interpersonal relationships.

Lobel & Surbano (2019) reported that Dumagat is a highly endangered language in dire need of documentation and preservation. Curiously, informants noted that the ability to speak and understand their native tongue is a form of gift. This valuation for their oral tradition seems to reflect the Dumagat-Remontados’ high regard for their elders (Gabriel,

2017) as at present, only senior members of the community remain fluent in it.

When asked if they know members of the community who have gifts, informants are quick to identify ancestors, kin, or community members. However, some informants expressed that compared to lowlanders, the Dumagat do not have gifts. For instance, Nardo who is one of the elders in the community expressed that “*Walang galing ang Dumagat. Wala nang magaling sa amin. Noon siguro, mga ninuno, mayroon pa.* (the Dumagat have no gifts. Nobody among us has. Back then, our ancestors, perhaps.)” This response is both surprising and unfortunate as it seems to confirm what the key informant expressed that some members of the Paglitao community engage in reverse ethnocentrism where they regard not only their home culture but themselves as inferior to people who visit their community bearing artifacts and practices from foreign dominant cultures (Teilhet-Waldor, 1979).

Origins and Development of Giftedness

When inquired about the origin and development of giftedness, informants espoused the inheritable nature of *galing*. Common responses enumerated on Table 2 depict the belief shared by the informants that gifts can be transferred from one person to another by virtue of mentorship, passing on of charms and incantation, and thru observational learning. While this beliefs carry the deterministic nature of giftedness, embraced by many Filipinos (Wong-Fernandez & Bustos-Oroza, 2007), the Dumagat-Remontados origin story of giftedness seems to lean towards social more than biological heredity. Responses share a common theme, *galing* is acquired from elders. The Tagalog term *salin-salin* (transferred from one person to the next), oft used by the informants, best portray the social nature of giftedness in Paglitao. This belief highlights the important role of elders as source of wisdom (Valsorable & Calalo, 2018) and even *galing*. In

other words, younger generations can acquire gifts only through the guidance and mentorship of community elders and when they are not able to pass these gifts to their rightful heir, they are lost with the demise of their bearers.

Moreover, the informants expressed that certain traits qualify a person as a rightful heir to their ancestors' gifts. These traits include *malakas na pangagatawan* (physical strength), it is believed that one should be strong enough to handle the gift. Interpersonal characteristics such as *matulungin* (being helpful) and *hindi mayabang* (humility) were also identified as qualities which makes one a suitable heir as it is believed that gifts should benefit the community. Moreover, if one is not humble, *galing* can also bring someone trouble as other people might be as gifted as the heir is. The *Dumagat* proverb *Ang bawat kaldero ay may suklob* (all pots have their own covers) best describe this position as it implies that even gifted ones have their match, therefore, it is important that one remains humble.

Table 2
Origins and Development of Giftedness

Responses in Tagalog	English Translation
Namamana mula sa ninuno	Inherited from ancestors
Salin-salin (salin, pagsasalin, sinasalin, salinan)	Passed from one person to another
Sinasalin sa karapat-dapat	Passed to a worthy heir
Itinuturo ng nakakatanda	Taught by elders
Natututunan sa panonood	Can be learned through observation

Pinag-aaralan	Through studying
Galing sa orasyon	From incantations
Pili ang tinuturuan ng orasyon	Few are selected to learn incantations
Pinapamana ang agimat	Charm is passed
Galing sa agimat	Coming from a charm

While the Philippines is regarded as the only predominantly Catholic nation in Asia, “its roots are founded in a long heritage of animistic belief (Wiley, 2011)”. To date, while a number of Christian groups tried to evangelize the people of Paglita, and while some of their beliefs have been modified by Roman Catholic Christianity, as in the belief in *orasyon* and in the practice of *pagsasalin* which is performed almost exclusively during Good Fridays, most of the community members remain animists. Salazar-Clemeña (1991) explained that the Filipino worldview is theocentric in nature. In this line of thinking, everyone is created in the likeness of God and that each is born with certain gifts or talent. While there is heavy leaning towards the Christian origins of giftedness in many Filipinos (Wong-Fernandez & Bustos-Oroza, 2007), it seems that informants of the current study diverge from this ideology. This is perhaps rooted in the *Dumagats*’ resistance to adapt the dominant Christian religion of their lowland neighbors and maintain their traditional animistic beliefs. However, one key feature of their religious belief is the lack of systematization (Peterson, 1991). Because of this, religion plays only a secondary role in the Dumagat-Remontados worldview. While it would be wrong to assume that religion is unimportant to the informants, it does have a slightly less significant place in their culture. Thus, their religious origin story of giftedness does not include God and only contains features of their animistic beliefs and practices.

When a word web of co-occurring codes was generated thru QDA Miner, it portrays *agimat* as a central code in the informants' ideas about the nature

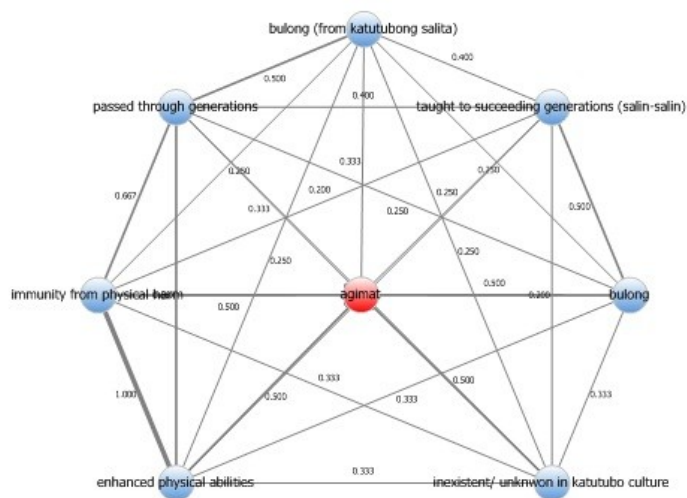


Figure 1. Word-web of co-occurring codes from the *pagtatanong-tanong* transcripts of the 10 informants.

of giftedness. As seen on Figure 1, *salin-salin* and *bulong* co-occur with each other in a similar fashion as enhanced physical abilities and immunity to physical harm do. However, these code-pairs are connected to each other by virtue of *agimat*. This implies that a central feature shared by the pairs is how they are originated from *agimat*.

Nature of Giftedness

Their rich environment and geographical isolation afforded a distinctive cultural self-sufficiency. Hence, the Dumagat-Remontados are able to preserve precolonial social and cultural patterns compared to most peoples in the region. In examining where the informants' concept of giftedness is positioned in the on-going argument about between the Mystery and Mastery Models of Giftedness, it can be deduced that the nature of giftedness espoused by the informants does not resemble orthodox Mystery Model nor does it appear to reside in the extreme Mastery Model. Evidenced in *pagtatanong-tanong* indicate that while informants believe in the inheritable quality (*namamana mula sa ninuno*) of *galing*, they also

believe that such feats can be acquired thru mentorship (*itinuturo ng nakakatanda*), observational learning (*natututunan sa panonood*) and even training (*pinag-aaralan*). Moreover, while informants' notion of giftedness resemble the categorical quality (*may galing vs walang galing*) of the Mystery Model, it also bear a semblance to the domain specific (physical gifts, language knowledge, healing prowess) and flexible nature of the Mastery Model. Therefore, while studies are needed to further investigate the Dumagat-Remontados conception of the nature of giftedness, it can be construed that based on this pilot study, a mixture of both Mystery and Mastery Models permeates the informants' notion of giftedness.

Dumagat Term for Giftedness

One of the main aim of the present research is to identify a distinct Dumagat term for giftedness. When informants were asked to think of a definite word to label giftedness, they usually could not. This is true to both speakers and non-speakers of Dumagat. This is similar to what Wong-Fernandez & Bustos-Oroza (2007) found in their Tagalog sample, whose responses were often given in context or in relationship rather than categories. This is perhaps because most people of Paglitaos speak Tagalog more than the indigenous *usap Dumagat*. The closest and oft used term related to giftedness in Paglitaos is *galing* which according to Headland & Headland (1974) means "to have supernatural magic powers."

Conclusion and Recommendation

The paradoxes and ambiguities that surfaced out in this study of the Dumagat-Remontados' conception of giftedness are indeed challenges in coming up with a categorical definition of giftedness. This simply proves that as concepts are contextualized, the nuances become more necessary than universal connotations. Moreover, as Sternberg (2004) posits, it is important to note the valuations in identifying giftedness. It seems that the Dumagat-Remontados, as semi-nomadic, value subsistence rather than

giftedness. Interestingly, all *galing* that are connected to physical abilities are all geared toward survival, wherein *agimat* is the primary medium that ties it all up.

With that being said, can there be an aid to the vagueness of the Dumagat-Remontados' conception of what were asked to them if the very assumption of the questions are intended for the production of knowledge and not for their sustenance? The word of a social anthropologist reverberates much here in this context that many Filipinos are just very busy surviving (Maggay, 1993). They may seem to be very oblivious that a lowlander would come up to them to inquire what they think about a certain concept.

Nevertheless, it should also be noted in ending that the paradoxes and ambiguities are also outcomes of asymmetry in power relations (Enriquez, 1976 & Maggay, 1993). The dissolution of the *usap Dumagat*, which for them was a characteristic of giftedness, happened because they may have subordinated themselves to people of foreign tongue. Formal education may seem almost valueless to them at the moment but for daily sustenance's sake, they may desperately concede to the kind of cultural pattern of the lowlanders. After which they will be alienated to what gifts they considered before in favor of the dominant scholastic achievements. It is possible to think on and on. But from the perspective of Indigenous Psychology, there needs to be cultural reaffirmations.

It will surely take a huge leap from where we are now. And this recommendation is generally apt for all minority people groups. But perhaps we can start reaffirming the Dumagat-Remontados tribe by having a culture-fair literature and an inclusive education.

On one hand, we may start by setting the culture of the Dumagat-Remontados on a par with every other culture. We can highlight their ways

of life and make them their *own* agents for their *own* flourishing so as to showcase their *own* authentic gifts and potentials. This recommendation may obviously appear simplistic and shortsighted. In fact, it seems only a platitude. But this is just because this study cannot speak for them with comprehensiveness. Hence, on the other hand, coming up with inclusive education may empower them to speak for their own. This is of course yoked with two challenges: to let them see its value; and to not succumb to dominant worldviews (e.g. academic intelligence brings about success). This is so that they could represent themselves as authentic Dumagat-Remontados tribe and not to allow foreign categories to define them. In so doing, we may be able to further broaden our understanding that includes their conceptions. In the thrust of this study, that their particular conception of giftedness could contribute to its universal understanding just as in the goal of Filipino Psychology (Enriquez, 1976).

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